



Biometrics and democracy
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Thema: Biometrie

Biometrics are becoming more and more prominent in discussions about how society will look in the future. This dossier looks at their projected use in voting systems across Europe.

Background:

Biometrics are already to be introduced into passports and visas at EU level (see [Biometrics LinksDossier](#)) and they are also to be used in national ID cards in [France](#) and in the proposed [UK identity card](#). In addition their use is being proposed for entry systems to buildings, for security in financial transactions and for access to computer systems.

Another area of life into which biometrics is encroaching is voting. Many pilot schemes have been run throughout Europe and internationally on electronic voting, most of which do not use biometric information, but some proponents maintain that biometrics are the only secure tool to use.

Issues:

- Security

There are three main issues on security in electronic voting:

- authenticating the identity of the voter;
- ensuring anonymity;
- preventing multiple voting.

- E-voting

Across Europe, schemes for e-voting have been piloted. Numerous private companies have come up with different systems which have met with a greater or lesser measure of success. Some systems involve voters going to specially designed booths and using electronic cards containing voter-specific information. Some allow voters to use private PCs, entering secret codes received by mail.

- E-Poll

As part of its eTEN programme, the EU backed a project called E-Poll (electronic polling system for remote operations) which ran from 2000-2002. It aimed to develop technologies which could allow citizens to vote electronically (including disabled and blind persons) and could cope with different languages so that it could be used across Europe. It foresaw a single technical platform, which could provide for voting through different technologies, i.e. with or without biometric data (fingerprints or optical recognition), via computer and via mobile phones.

- Pilot projects

In Italy, a pilot e-voting project using biometrics was run by Ladispoli in September 2004. Multimedia booths were placed at strategic points in town centres. There was also a mobile booth for those unable to travel. Voters first registered and gave fingerprints. They were then issued with an electronic card containing their biometric data. The voter, once in the booth, put their finger into a reader which checked the print against the information on the card. The vote was then cast electronically and the data sent to central computers.

Other schemes have been run in France, Poland and [Switzerland](#). E-voting will be used in certain parts of France for voting in the referendum on the European Constitution.

- Ethics

The data protection [directive](#) of 1995 gives general protection for the use of personal data on individuals. However, there is recognition that technology is outstripping existing legislation. Therefore, a European project to study the ethical implications of the increasing use of biometric technology has been set up under the EU's [6th Research Framework Programme](#). The project, called BITE (biometric identification technology ethics), aims to launch a social, legal and ethical debate over the use of biometrics involving all parties working in the field.

Positions:

Those heading research into biometrics see it as the most reliable method of verifying identity, capable of providing security and privacy of personal data and opening services, via computer networks, to housebound and blind persons.

The Commission's [IDABC E-government newsletter](#), ascribes its reliability to the fact that identification depends, not on a thing that a person owns (credit card) or knows (password) but what they are.

The EU BioSecurity Initiative (Biosec), a research project set up in 2003, sees biometrics as the key technology for guaranteeing the security of personal data.

Eurosmart, representing European smart card industry sees smart cards associated with biometrics as the "best and most cost effective technology for the future security of personal ID systems".

The IDEA, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance is suspicious of such new electoral technologies. It takes the view that the use of such technologies is pushed by industry only for the duration of any election campaign and therefore is unlikely to be sustainable.

[Experts](#) in the US have argued that existing internet technology cannot guarantee a single vote per person while protecting voter identity. Professor David Wagner from the University of California has said, "basing a voting system on the internet poses unavoidable risks of voting fraud and privacy risks".

Concerns have been raised over data protection and biometrics in other policy areas. MEP

Sarah Ludford, in her report on the proposal that visas should include biometric identifiers, has warned of the dangers of a "surveillance society".

Statewatch and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have voiced grave concerns over the proliferation of the amount of data held electronically about individual citizens. In April 2005, it joined other civil liberties groups, including ACLU, to form the [International Campaign against Mass Surveillance](#).

Links:

Official Documents

- Biosec: [Biometric data to support secure and trust identification](#) (March 2004)
- Parliament: [Report by MEP Sarah Ludford on the proposal for a regulation concerning the Visa Information System \(VIS\)](#)
- Cordis News : [BITE project initiates a European debate on the ethics of biometrics](#) (12 May 2005)
- BITE: [Biometric Identification Technology Ethics](#)
- Joint Research Centre: [Biometrics at the Frontiers: assessing the impact on society](#) (5 Feb 2005)
- DG Infosoc: [E-Poll: Electronic Polling System for Remote operation](#)
- DG Infosoc: [Ladispoli Tests Electronic voting](#)
- DG Infosoc:IDABC: [World's largest Internet election successfully conducted in the Netherlands](#)
- DG Infosociety: IDABC [Biometric Technologies come to e-government](#)
- DG Infosociety: IDABC : E-Government news [Biometric-enabled e-voting system could help foster e-inclusion](#)

International Organisations

- Council of Europe: [Democratic representation](#)
- World Summit on the Information Society: [website](#)
- International Telecoms Union: [website](#)

Governments

- UK Select Committee on Home Affairs: [Government Proposals For Identity Card Scheme](#)
- UK Select Committee on Home Affairs: [Report on Identity Cards - Biometrics](#)
- The US Biometric Consortium: [website](#)
- Us Dept of Justice: Office of Diversion Control: [Biometrics & Computer Security](#)
- Nigerian Government: [Independent National Electoral Commission](#)

Industry

- International Biometric Group: [website](#)
- Eurosmart: [Recommendations for European Identity Initiatives, European visa, Passport and eGovernment services](#) (Sept 2003)
- Eynetwatch: [Biometric technology system to prevent fraud in registration of 60 million Nigerian voters](#)
- Syntel: [Advanced Technology Group](#)

- Steria: [From e-voting to the protection of world leaders](#)

NGOs and Think-Tanks

- Statewatch: [Biometrics - EU takes another step down the road to 1984](#)
- American Civil Liberties Union: [Privacy & Technology](#)

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